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THE HONGKONG DISPENSARY.
Hongkong, 9th January, 1897.

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The Daily Press.

HONGKONG, JANUARY 16th, 1897.

The significance and value of the proclamation recently issued with reference to the transit pass trade in the province of Kwangsi have been strongly misapprehended by both our evening contemporaries. To begin with the personal question, the China Mail sees "no reason whatever" "around" in regard to the subject. It seems to us that when a man succeeds in doing what his successors have either been unable to do or being able have neglected to do he certainly merits congratulation, and for that reason Sir CLAUDE MACDONALD is to be congratulated on having secured the issuing of the proclamation in question. The personal question, however, is of small importance and all we would say further on the point is to express a hope that if the Minister should happen to read what has been written in Hongkong on his diplomatic victory he will not suppose that the capacious tone in which it is referred to by our contemporaries in any way represents the feeling of the mercantile community, who, we are sure, desire to render honour where honour is due.

The China Mail doubts "whether European" merchants will entrust their "goods to the tender mercies of Chinese" "subordinate officials," meaning whether they will send their goods into the interior under transit pass. But there is no room whatever for doubt on the subject. When for a brief period some years ago transit passes were issued at Canton the privilege was very largely availed of and trade was sensibly increased thereby; history in this respect will repeat itself. Our contemporary, however, blows hot and cold, and after expressing its belief that the proclamation will be of comparatively little use unless under this, that, and the other condition, it concludes by being "prepared to hope something from the promised application of the transit pass" "system to the southern provinces"; but this hope can take shape only "when based" "upon the assurance determination on" "the part of H.B.M. Minister to see that" "the promises now made by the Chinese" "shall be faithfully carried out." The reference made in the proclamation itself to the Minister's action affords very good proof of such a determination on his part, and our contemporary may therefore rest content.

The Hongkong Telegraph is still more unreasonable and is inaccurate on one very important matter of fact. It asks what is the use of the proclamation, characterizing it as purposeless, and says "there have been" "hundreds of proclamations on the same" "subject before." It admits, however, that "this proclamation is a little more clearly" "worded than most of the others," which is equivalent to a direct statement that the

writer had the terms of the previous "hundreds of proclamations" present in his mind at the time he wrote. Can he give us a reference to any one such proclamation? The documents previously published having reference to Mr. Andrews' case would not serve the purpose, for they were promptly declared unsatisfactory and null, moreover, he considered merely as stepping stones leading up to the present proclamation; the whole, belonging to the same series. The present proclamation is not only "a little more clearly worded than most of the others," but it is the complete and absolute consecration of a principle that has hitherto been most vigorously contested by the Canton Government. Our contemporary further says that "until the Chinese Government" "publishes a proclamation addressed to the" "officials of all grades expressly prohibiting" "them from levying charges in excess of" "those authorized by treaty and imposing" "a penalty for every infraction of the law" "there will be no alteration or improvement." The proclamation explicitly sets out that it has been issued in obedience to the orders of the Tientsin Yamen made at the instance of the British Minister and transmitted through the Viceroy, and it establishes the law as clearly as could be desired, much more clearly than could be done by any general proclamation prohibiting squeezing, which none of the officials would take as having a personal application. Our contemporary further says that while the proclamation defines the rights of traders "it imposes no corresponding" "duties on the revenue farmers and local" "officials." Seeing that the Central Local Official formally and absolutely renounces his claim to levy lekin on transit-pass goods we fail to see how the matter could well be carried further, as the whole question in dispute was the illegal levy of lekin. In fact we have never read a proclamation issued at the instance of a Foreign Minister that could be regarded as more satisfactory and conclusive than the present one. It has been made unavailing under pressure, and as a matter of course the Chinese will try to evade it, just as they have tried to evade the Opium Agreement, but it rests with these interested to see that such attempts are successfully frustrated, as the attempts to evade the Opium Agreement have been successfully frustrated.

What are the real facts of the case? The transit right to convey goods to the interior under transit pass was clear and indisputable, but the position taken up by the Canton Government was that, though transit passes would be issued if applied for, the goods on arrival at their destination and when parted from the transit pass would be taxed to an extent that would make it unprofitable to take out transit passes. This was the principle they attempted to apply in Mr. Andrews' case, the native merchants at Wuhoe being informed that any goods purchased from him would be taxed "with duty and lekin" "again." This, then, was the whole question in dispute. After a long delay Mr. Andrews was allowed to dispose of his goods and was also, still later, compensated for the loss he had incurred through the delay, but the proclamations issued in connection with the case were, in the words of the Minister as quoted in the present proclamation, not sufficient to remove the apprehension existing in the minds of Chinese traders. It is therefore now expressly declared that the payment of transit duty "takes" "the place of the lekin ordinarily payable" "in transit, and every custom-house" "and barrier or route shall, after examination, allow the goods to pass without levying" "any further charge whatsoever thereon." Moreover, when the goods have "ceased to be under the protection of the" "pass, such goods are, under the lekin regulations, entitled to the same treatment" "as produce of a similar nature which has" "paid lekin en route, and are not to be" "discriminated against." The proclamation goes on to say that if further duties are leviable on goods that have paid lekin on transit pass goods will be liable to the same but no higher duties. It is unfortunate that the right to levy any further duty at all should be admitted, but that point was conceded long ago and it is useless arguing it again now.

What will the practical effect of the proclamation be? In 1891 for some reason hitherto unexplained the Canton Government relaxed its opposition to the transit pass trade. The result is shown in the following extract from the report of Mr. L. ROBERTS, Commissioner of Customs, for that year:—"There were issued 1,948 transit passes, representing a value of HK \$1,741,804, against a net issue in 1890, and 79 passes, value HK \$1,195,127, in 1890." To this remarkable development of the transit trade is partially "due the advance, evidenced by the table" "of imports, and it also shows to what an" "enormous extent, with lighter taxation" "and unfettered transit privilege, the trade" "and prosperity of the province could be" "increased." In the following year, however, the same Commissioner in his report under the heading "Inland Transit" writes:—"This most promising trade ceased completely in July. Thus, from January to July, 1892, there were issued 492 transit passes, representing a value of HK \$1,406,696, showing, as compared with the figures for 1891, the enormous decrease of 1,448 passes, value HK \$1,355,168, or 76.6 per cent. To the extinction of this trade is mainly attributable the decline" "evidenced in the table of imports." Traders will naturally be as eager to avail themselves of the privileges of the transit pass now as they were in 1891, and the increase in the volume of trade that followed them, as indicated in Mr. ROBERTS' reports, will, follow now, greatly to the advantage of this colony.

The forth for the census to be taken on the 20th January were distributed yesterday.

Sentence of four months' imprisonment was passed yesterday on a man who was found in possession of a large quantity of opium, with a view to its sale, and a woman in Public Square Street, Yau-mai. A rich old man who was formerly in the employ of the Customs and who had been arrested at once gave chase and caught the thief.

Articles for the Hongkong Bazaar close to the Clerk of the Court at 3 p.m. to-day.

The P.M. steamer China, with mails, left Shanghai for Hongkong yesterday at 2 p.m.

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LEE, Ger. str., Pfaff—Stomson & Co.
 EDWA, Brit. bk., Rollberg—Shewan, Tomes
 & Co.

